

OSLO

THE CAPITAL OF CHARM

By DOMINICK & SUSAN MERLE

OSLO, Norway---There's a tiny bakery in the heart of Oslo that draws more spectators than customers, all because the bakers got tired of going up and down a flight of stairs.

Author
Dominick Merle
(right) with
Norwegian
tourism
representative
Harald Hansen.



The remedy was "flying bread baskets" from the bakery below to the store above via a conveyor belt that looks like something out of an old Charlie Chaplin movie. The bakers fill the baskets with bread and goodies, they're elevated to the ceiling of the upstairs store, dipping at strategic points so the sales staff can replenish the supplies. It works something like a ferris wheel.

In addition to the Chaplinesque delivery system, another spectators' attraction is a chocolate fountain about 3-feet high in the center of the main showcase. Pick your pastry and the clerk will give it a splash, inside and out, at the fountain. The chocolate continues to circulate (again like a ferris wheel) to prevent waste.

"If even 40 percent of the people who come in buy something," said Stig, "we'll do just fine."

While we were there, we observed the ferris wheel in action. A saleslady made a refill order over the store's intercom to the bakers below, and within two minutes the flying basket appeared overhead and descended to her. It was filled with millefleurs, a typical French pastry

The bakery itself is only about four years old, but there is an old-time atmosphere---the workers all wear brown caps,

Vigeland Park





there are worn wooden benches for eat-ins, an ancient coffee grinder and millstone here and there, and light bulbs hang from plain black wires. The coffee served is roasted on the spot.

"Did you know that Norwegians are one of the world's highest consumers of coffee?" Stig asked. "And another thing, we eat more pizza per capita than any country on earth, including Italy."

He looked around at the bakery counters and then above at the

conveyor belt, and I distinctly saw a light bulb flash on above his head.

Flying pizza?

Walking into this unusual bakery is one of the many surprises of Oslo. This Scandinavian port doesn't get the press of some of the other European capital cities--like Paris, Rome and even Stockholm--but what it lacks in size and fanfare, it makes up for with charm.

The city dates back to 1000 A.D when its population was under

3,000. Today, although still one of the smallest capital cities, its population exceeds 500,000. And because of its cozy size, it is a walker's delight.

From the heart of the city, near that neat bakery, it is an easy stroll to the cruise port filled with quaint shops and restaurants to fit any pocketbook. Also within walking distance is Oslo's famed Vigeland Sculpture Park spread over 80 acres and containing 212 bronze and granite statues.

The statues trace the cycle of life, from birth to death.

A 10-minute drive from the city center is the Viking Museum which contains three Viking ships found in burial mounds in the Oslo fjord. These burial vessels were designed to "carry the dead to the other world."

You'll find all of these attractions listed in the city's official guide book. What you won't find in the guidebook is that delightful sidewalk café where the

The aerial bakery shop in action!



Flying- bread basket.



manager joined you for an espresso, that little boutique at the cruise port where the saleslady was more interested in you than making a sale, sitting on a bench in the town square with the locals and acting like

one...and, of course, those flying bread baskets.

(Dominick A. Merle is Canadian Director of the International Food & Travel Writers Assn. and resides in Montreal).